Abstract
Media are considered to be the public’s primary source of information regarding mental illness. Evidence suggests that media representations of people with psychiatric disorders are frequently negative and contribute to their stigmatization. On the other hand, media can play an important role in reducing this stigmatisation by providing adequate information about this topic and engaging in antistigma campaigns. Up to now there was no standardised measurement of the stigma of mental illness in print media using clearly operationalized definitions. The objectives of this project were twofold; to develop a standardised and objective instrument to measure stigma of mental illness in print media; and to conduct an analysis of the current coverage on mental health/illness issues in Czech, Croatian, and Slovak print media. The development of the Picture of Mental Illness in Newspapers (PICMIN) instrument was based on the principles of content analysis, a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from text to the kontext in their use. The instrument consists of eleven descriptive and five analytical categories. The most interesting findings based on the analysis of media representations of mental illness were; a similarly high level of stigmatizing articles across countries, clearly exceeding the ones with destigmatizing statements; domination of tabloids in stigmatizing content; longer articles having much lesser stigmatizing potential; overrepresentation of schizophrenia and eating disorders and underrepresentation of anxiety disorders and dementia when comparing the correlation of their actual rate in the populations; the greatest predictor of positive outcome being a reference from a scientific survey and from a mental health professional; homicide being most frequently mentioned in the context of psychotic disorders, while affective disorders being most frequently associated with completed suicides; the proportion of articles depicting mental disorders together with aggressive deeds constituting one-third of all articles; the vast majority of articles with violent content presenting mentally ill people as perpetrators. Coverage of mental health/illness issues differs to large extent across countries, but is generally of poor quality. Several activities that should tighten together the mental health and media professionals have already been initiated (e.g. interviews have been given to the newspapers, journalists have been approached via press conferences, a prize for the best article on the issue of mental health/illness in the print media) in an ultimate effort to improve media coverage of mental illness issues, thus minimizing potential discriminatory practices and increasing help-seeking behavior.

Key words: mental health, mental illness, stigmatization, print media, content analysis, responsible journalism